

Traveling Companion: Getting Lost on the Road of Life

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The other evening, I was returning from my eighteen-mile bike ride along the beach. My brow leaked beads of sweat. The palms of my hands ached from the pressure on my 10-speed bike's handlebars. My rear end ached from its sedentary position on a banana saddle. The evening sun cast dancing shadows from the tired trees. The waves from the Gulf punctured the silence with their loud, dramatic death knell as they died against the sea wall.

During my ride, I had processed many hopes, unfinished business, situations to be embraced, and decisions to be made. I recycled my thoughts, expectations, what if's, nuances and ruminations as, hopefully, I cycled my way to better health and fitness.

I had saluted and said quick "hi's" to folks who jogged along the seawall; to bikers who rambled past me. I had accepted the greeting of leisurely fisher folks casting and pulling nets along the way. I had carefully avoided the freshly blown sand on the roadside and negotiated the bumps and bruises on the road surface. Cars and trucks passed; some at a leisurely pace, others caught up in a drag race mentality. I claimed my own bike lane, my own yard of the road and most respected it. Some pulled in behind me to allow an oncoming vehicle to pass; others raced their engine to pass and blast me with a cloud of hot air.

Then it happened. A green pick up truck, with a Louisiana license tag, began to pass me. As it was passing, a gentleman stuck his head out the passenger door window and shouted at me, "Get the hell off the road or you'll get killed." I shouted back, "Get lost." And he did as his driver sped away.

I peddled on at my own pace as the truck disappeared in the distance. Now I had some other thoughts to digest and mull over. I began to reflect on impatience and wonder why it is one of most confessed sins.

Obviously, I was a nuisance to the pick up passenger; an obstacle on his joy ride; a hindrance on his cruise down the beach; an irritant that may have slowed him down momentarily even though there were no other vehicles in sight.

A short time later, some young people in a green car passed and started shouting at me. I was lucky to get their Hancock Co. personalized license tag and will be watching out for it again.

Why do we have such a difficult time with patience, I began to wonder. Patiently, I began to tease out the implications of that question during the rest of my journey home. I began to realize that life is filled with expectations; expectations of ourselves and expectations we have of others. Expectations we have of ourselves are good in that they provide and guide our initiative to maximize the use of our gifts, talents and opportunities. But we get in trouble when we transfer such expectation to others. We expect and presume that others can deliver on our expectations of them without walking in their shoes, reflecting on their resources or capabilities or discerning their interests and priorities.

So often we begin to measure our success or failure on how people respond to and/or live up to our expectations of them. We begin to measure our worth on the scales on their response. If they don't measure up to our expectations, then we fail; if they do, then we can pat ourselves on the back for our achievements.

Society compounds this attitude because it defines us in relation to others, what we own, where we live, our salary, and our achievements. We become clones in identity rather than individuals in diversity.

We measure by comparisons rather than through individual giftedness and resources. We measure by standards set by others that imprison us in a world of comparisons rather than a world of uniqueness.

It is sad that the people who tell us to "get the hell off the road" of life are really lost in their own world of egotism, ignorance, narrow-mindedness and impatience with other fellow travelers.